

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1085

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 17958

EXDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS TO DEFENSE FOR SECRETARY SCHLESINGER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MILI, FR

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH FRENCH DEFENSE MINISTER SOUFFLET

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: IN MY FIRST MEETING WITH FRENCH DEFENSE MINISTER SOUFFLET WE DISCUSSED THE F-104 REPLACEMENT ISSUE, THE FRENCH DEFENSE BUDGET AND SEVERAL OTHER SUBJECTS. I SPOKE OF U.S. SATISFACTION WITH FRANCO-AMERICAN MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONS. I ALSO REMINDED HIM OF OUR CONTINUED INTEREST IN FRELOC. SOUFFLET SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO MEET SECRETARY SCHLESINGER, ONCE THE NEW GOF HAS SORTED OUT ITS DEFENSE POLICY. I RECOMMEND THAT SECRETARY SCHLESINGER CONSIDER A MEETING EITHER IN U.S. OR EUROPE LATER THIS YEAR OR EARLY NEXT. END SUMMARY.

2. I PAID A COURTESY CALL ON DEFENSE MINISTER SOUFFLET JULY 23. IT WAS OUR FIRST MEETING. IN THE COURSE OF THE CONVERSATION, WE DISCUSSED THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

3. F-104 REPLACEMENT: SOUFFLET RAISED THIS SUBJECT, SAYING THAT HE REALIZED THIS WAS A DELICATE ISSUE IN VIEW OF THE COMPETITION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND FRANCE TO WIN THE CONTRACTS FOR REPLACEMENT OF THE F-104 AIRCRAFT IN SEVERAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID, HE WISHED TO TALK FRANKLY ABOUT THE REASONS THAT
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COMPELLED THE FRENCH TO TAKE THIS SUBJECT SO SERIOUSLY.

FIRST, HE NOTED THAT THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION IN FRANCE FORCED THE GOF TO EXPAND ITS EXPORTS AND THAT REPLACEMENT OF THE F-104 BY A FRENCH AIRCRAFT WOULD BE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVING FRANCE'S BALANCE OF PAYMENTS SITUATION AND TO MAINTAINING THE HEALTH OF AN IMPORTANT FRENCH INDUSTRY. SECOND, HE SAID THAT HE FEARED THAT THE CURRENT TREND AMONG THE EUROPEANS TO LOSE INTEREST IN THEIR OWN DEFENSE -- A TREND THAT ALREADY PREOCCUPIED THE FRENCH -- WOULD BE REINFORCED IF THE EUROPEANS SAW THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A KEY ARMAMENT INDUSTRY. SOUFFLET IMPLIED THAT SHOULD FRANCE LOSE THE F-104 REPLACEMENT COMPETITION, THE RESULT WOULD BE THE END OF ANY HOPE FOR A EUROPEAN MILITARY AVIATION INDUSTRY. I RESPONDED THAT, OF COURSE, THE UNITED STATES WAS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT ITS FUTURE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS SITUATION, AND THAT THE ADOPTION OF ONE OF THE AMERICAN COMPETITORS BY THE EUROPEAN NATIONS WOULD HAVE A MAJOR BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON OUR BALANCE OF PAYMENTS OVER THE COMING YEARS. MOREOVER, THE U.S. IS CONCERNED THAT ITS AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY PROSPER. I STRESSED, HOWEVER, THE MILITARY ADVANTAGES THAT WE PERCEIVED FROM A EUROPEAN SELECTION OF AN AMERICAN REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT: IT WOULD MOVE NATO TOWARD STANDARDIZATION SO IMPORTANT IN THE CASE OF AIR WARFARE, AND IT WOULD PROVIDE A MORE SATISFACTORY SYSTEM FOR MAINTENANCE AND REPLACEMENT PARTS. SOUFFLET MENTIONED THAT HE HOPED THE COMPETITION WOULD BE JUDGED ON ECONOMIC AND MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS, AND THAT POLITICAL PRESSURE WOULD NOT PLAY A ROLE IN THE FINAL CHOICE BY THE FOUR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, A STATEMENT TO WHICH I AGREED (ALTHOUGH I ADMIT TO GREAT SKEPTICISM AS TO FRANCE'S REFRAINING FROM EXERTING STRONG POLITICAL PRESSURE).

4. FRENCH DEFENSE BUDGET: SOUFFLET SAID THAT THE GOF WAS IN THE PROCESS OF A THOROUGH RE-EXAMINATION OF ITS DEFENSE POLICY, A PROCESS THAT MIGHT LEAD TO CERTAIN "CHANGES IN DIRECTION" IN ITS POLICY. SOUFFLET SAID THAT THE ENTIRE FRENCH BUDGET WOULD BE UNDER SERIOUS PRESSURE FOR REDUCTION AND HE DID NOT EXCLUDE THE DEFENSE BUDGET FROM THE EFFECTS OF THIS PRESSURE. AT ANOTHER

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POINT IN THE DISCUSSION, HE CONCURRED THAT THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION MIGHT COMPEL FRANCE TO ESTABLISH NEW PRIORITIES AMONG ITS AMBITIOUS AND EXPENSIVE PROGRAMS INVOLVING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY (NUCLEAR, MISSILE, CONCORDE, ETC.). I SAID THAT THE U.S. HAD COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT WE WERE NO LONGER ABLE TO PURSUE "INDEPENDENCE" AS WE HAD IN THE PAST, GIVEN TODAY'S REALITIES OF

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 17958

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INTERDEPENDENCE. I SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH I REALIZED WHAT FRANCE MEANT, FRANCE'S PREOCCUPATION WITH "INDEPENDENCE" PUZZLED THE AVERAGE AMERICAN AS HE NOW REALIZED THE U.S. WAS NOT ABLE TO BE "INDEPENDENT" AND THAT THE WORLD TODAY SEEMED TO REQUIRE CLOSER COOPERATION. SOUFFLET AGREED THAT THERE MIGHT BE SOME ROOM FOR ENHANCED FRANCO-AMERICAN COOPERATION, FOR EXAMPLE TO HELP THE FRENCH ATTAIN THROUGH A COOPERATIVE EFFORT THE TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS THAT ARE LIKELY TO BE INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN INDEPENDENTLY AND UNILATERALLY.

5. FRENCH DEFENSE EFFORTS: SOUFFLET SEEMED PLEASED WITH THE ACHIEVEMENTS THAT THE FRENCH HAVE MADE IN THE FIELD OF CONVENTIONAL FORCES AND IN THEIR STRATEGIC FORCES INCLUDING THEIR AIR, MISSILE, AND SSBN DELIVERY SYSTEMS. HE WAS PARTICULARLY PROUD OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS THAT THE FRENCH HAVE MADE IN THEIR SSBN FLEET.

6. US-FRENCH MILITARY COOPERATION: I TOLD SOUFFLET THAT WE WERE PLEASED WITH THE MILITARY-TO-MILITARY COOPERATION THAT EXISTED BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES AND WE HOPED THIS COOPERATION WOULD CONTINUE. SOUFFLET RESPONDED THAT THE FRENCH, TOO, WERE PLEASED WITH THE PROGRESS SO FAR AND HOPED THAT IT WOULD CONTINUE AND PERHAPS EVEN EXPAND. THERE WAS NO DISCUSSION OF WHAT FORM SUCH AN EXPANSION MIGHT TAKE.

7. SECDEF-SOUFFLET MEETING: SOUFFLET TOOK THE INITIA-

TIVE IN SUGGESTING THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO MEET WITH SEC-
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RETARY OF DEFENSE SCHLESINGER AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME IN
THE FUTURE. REFERRING TO THE DEFENSE REVIEW MENTIONED
IN PARA 4 ABOVE, SOUFFLET SAID THAT SUCH A MEETING WOULD
PROBABLY BE MORE USEFUL ONCE THE GOF DEFENSE REVIEW HAD
BEEN COMPLETED. HE THOUGHT THAT SOME TIME TOWARD THE
END OF THIS YEAR OR EARLY NEXT YEAR MIGHT BE ABOUT RIGHT.

8. FRELOC: WHEN SOUFFLET ASKED ME WHETHER I HAD ANY
"PROBLEMS" TO RAISE WITH HIM, I MENTIONED THE FRELOC
ISSUE, SAYING THAT THIS CONTINUES TO POSE DIFFICULTIES
FOR US, PARTICULARLY IN OUR RELATIONS WITH CONGRESS. IT
WAS CLEAR FROM SOUFFLET'S RESPONSE THAT HE HAS NOT YET
COME TO GRIPS WITH THE FRELOC ISSUE.

9. COMMENT: SOUFFLET SEEMS TO BE A MAN WITH WHOM WE
WILL BE ABLE TO HAVE FRANK DISCUSSION ACROSS THE SPEC-
TRUM OF DEFENSE ISSUES. HE IS STILL IN THE PROCESS OF
LEARNING THE DEFENSE DOSSIER AND DOES NOT YET HAVE THE
TECHNICAL COMMAND OF A GALLEY OR A DEBRE. HE STRESSED
REPEATEDLY HIS WILLINGNESS TO TALK WITH ME IN THE FUTURE
AT ANY TIME AND ON ANY SUBJECT WHICH I THOUGHT MERITED
HIS ATTENTION. HIS ATTITUDE WAS VERY MUCH IN KEEPING
WITH THE GENERAL ATMOSPHERE OF "AVAILABILITY" WHICH HAS
CHARACTERIZED THE GISCARD GOVERNMENT IN ITS RELATIONS
WITH OUR EMBASSY. REGARDING SOUFFLET'S INTEREST IN A
MEETING WITH DEFENSE SECRETARY SCHLESINGER, I BELIEVE
SOUFFLET WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO COME TO THE UNITED STATES
FOR A VISIT ALONG THE LINES OF THE GALLEY TRIP IN SEP-
TEMBER 1973. ALTERNATIVELY, I RECEIVED THE IMPRESSION
THAT SOUFFLET WOULD BE PREPARED TO MEET WITH SECRETARY
SCHLESINGER IN EUROPE, PERHAPS DURING ONE OF THE SECRE-
TARY'S TRIPS TO EUROPE ON OTHER BUSINESS. I SUGGEST
THAT SECRETARY SCHLESINGER CONSIDER EXTENDING AN INVITA-
TION TO SOUFFLET TO VISIT THE U.S. OR ARRANGE TO CALL
ON HIM IN EUROPE. IF SECRETARY SCHLESINGER SHOULD
PREFER TO MEET WITH SOUFFLET IN EUROPE, HE MAY WISH TO
COMBINE A VISIT TO PARIS WITH HIS TRIP TO EUROPE
FOR THE BRUSSELS DPC MEETING IN DECEMBER. IN SUCH
A CASE, WE WOULD WANT TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK WITH SOUFFLET
DURING THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS TO BLOCK A CONVENIENT
TIME.

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